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NICOLE NEWENDORP

Introduction

Mrs. Lee is a Chinese-born woman in her mid-50s who currently lives and works in Boston.[1] She immigrated to the U.S. a few years ago with her husband, after she retired from her factory job in China. Originally from Guangdong Province, she is Toisanese. Like many other Toisanese, she comes from a family of migrants: her grandfather was the first to come to America, followed by her father. They both returned to China, along with her great-uncle, during her youth, seemingly ending a pattern of family involvement overseas until the early 1970s, when her younger brother finally made it safely across the border from Guangdong to Hong Kong, after several unsuccessful attempts. She told me:

> It was 1973. At the time, there were a lot of mainlanders who illegally escaped to Hong Kong because living in China was very difficult… So, my brother escaped to Hong Kong to find a living. … He had tried a couple of times before but was unsuccessful. Trying to migrate illegally was very dangerous; you had to swim in the ocean…. If you weren't successful, in China, after you were captured … you were…. [recording breaks off].

I never did learn what punishments Mrs. Lee's brother had to endure as a result of his capture following his several failed attempts to get into Hong Kong, because in recounting her brother's story, Mrs. Lee became so upset that she could not continue speaking. How many times did he try before he

was successful? Was his punishment worse each time he was caught? Did he almost drown in the shark-infested waters refugees had to cross to land safely in Hong Kong? How long did the rest of his family have to wait—and at what cost to them—for news of his safe arrival? While the answers to these unspoken questions were left up to my imagination, one thing was very clear: the relative ease with which Mrs. Lee had come to the U.S.—sponsored by her sister, rejoining her other siblings who all live in and around the Boston area—seemed to stand in stark contrast to the relative lack of control over decisions to move from one location to another that she and her family members had experienced as adults in Maoist-era China. In this way, her migration story, inflected as it is with deep emotion centering around the contrast between contemporary experiences of mobility and past experiences of immobility, mirrored the migration stories of many other Chinese seniors who have moved to the U.S. in recent years, following their retirement in China.

The seeming ease with which Chinese seniors immigrate to the U.S. today stands in sharp contrast to the challenges of migrating faced by residents of Southeast China for most of the 19th and 20th centuries. Although post-1949 People's Republic of China (PRC) limitations on movement internally and abroad—as demonstrated by Mrs. Lee's account—were primary factors preventing migration during the second half of the 20th century, historical accounts chronicling the obstacles to trans-Pacific Chinese family life begin much earlier, during the long period of Chinese exclusion to the U.S. from 1882 to 1943. During those six decades, most Chinese were barred from entering the U.S. legally to work, and the majority of those Chinese male sojourners who were able to enter the U.S. were barred from bringing their Chinese wives or other female family members to settle with them. Focusing on the economic structures and social norms in both China and the U.S. in which Chinese transnational families were embedded over the course of the 20th century, scholars have emphasized collectively-held familial goals and ideals for economic success and stability to explain how families continued to exist as social and economic institutions over decades of geographical separation among husbands, wives, and children as husbands left wives and children behind in China to pursue opportunities for the family's material survival by traveling abroad in California or other North American locations (see, for example, Hsu 2000). Even so, historian Michael Szonyi explains that exclusion-era migration was a "risky strategy" for raising "the material and social status of the family," because "individual members of the family interpreted that strategy through the lens of their individual aspirations and survival needs, and this frequently led to conflict" (2005: 61-2). Szonyi's emphasis on the agency of individual familial actors—who still shared a collective familial goal—represents a shift from accounts that focus on collective familial aspirations at the expense of individual agency in Chinese transnational family lifeways.[2] This focus on the dialectic of the individual and the collective

in Chinese transnational family life is further reinforced through Aihwa Ong's work on contemporary transnational Hong Kong families, whose individual members make strategic use of possibilities for "flexible citizenship" inherent in global capitalist structures to achieve the economic security lacking for them in post-colonial Hong Kong (1999).

My account here of Chinese seniors' migration trajectories to the U.S. in recent years builds on this increasing scholarly focus on the dialectic of the individual and collective in Chinese transnational family life by examining the motivations and desires of senior migrants who make use of recent opportunities for transnational mobility between China and the U.S. to reunite with family in the U.S.—all the while leaving other family members behind in China. As Karen Fog Olwig, an ethnographer of Caribbean diasporic families, notes, a life story methodology is particularly well-suited for documenting how individual and familial senses of identity are created and sustained over time and space. She explains:

> By investigating life stories related by individuals in dispersed family networks, one can explore the complexity of the movements and interconnectedness, rupture, and continuity that has been described as such a central feature of the modern age of globalization. The life stories related by migrants and their descendants will describe departures, arrivals, and life trajectories that span different areas of the world. They will also depict the complicated ways in which individual lives have been influenced by wider social, economic, political, and legal structures that have provided individuals with various opportunities and constraints. … Life stories … offer important insights into how migratory moves are experienced and given meaning by those most affected by them (2007: 285).

As Olwig suggests, the life story-based approach I have adopted for understanding Chinese-born seniors' migration practices has revealed interesting emotional contours of Chinese transnational familial lives, including the topic on which I focus this paper: how tales of past periods of separation from family members, and the feelings of fear, worry, and upset that went along with those separations, continue to be residually powerful in recent migrants' lives and have emerged as a key trope as seniors talk about their decisions to migrate to the U.S. following their retirement in China. The separations seniors talked about—like Mrs. Lee's story about her brother's illegal flight to Hong Kong—have their bases both in the long decades of exclusion-era politics that separated families across the Pacific from 1882-1943 and also in the political, social, and economic controls imposed on Chinese citizens during the Maoist period. In all cases, these past histories seem to stand in sharp contrast to Chinese citizens' contemporary ability to make use of transnational ties and connections to mobilize particular migration trajectories, allowing them to reunite with family members living in the U.S..

By drawing on life story narrative accounts of Chinese seniors who migrate to the U.S. late in life, I seek to highlight the affective ties that animate and structure the negotiations of individual family members who must make decisions to *move here* or *stay there* and, in so doing, are forced to reconcile familial needs and pragmatic interests with emotional desires to be with some family members in the U.S. versus being separated from other family members in China. With this approach, I situate Chinese seniors' narrative accounts of their motivations for migration within a body of literature that explores "the affective dimensions of contemporary transnational processes" (Faier 2007: 149), through which scholars interrogate the ways in which intimacy and affective ties are created and sustained over geographical distance. These works embed transnational relations of intimacy in global power structures of inequality and explore the (often) devastating emotional consequences for family members who struggle with negotiating their familial roles—as parents and children, as husbands and wives—over geographical distance (see, for example, Constable 2003, Brennan 2004, Parrenas 2005, Chamberlain 2006, Olwig 2007, and Newendorp 2008). For example, Rhacel Parrenas, writing about the economic migration of Filipina domestic workers, recounts the emotional costs of this global labor industry on the migrant workers' children left behind in the Philippines—who are prevented from joining their mothers abroad by their mothers' low income, domestic-service working situations, as well as by immigration policies that restrict migrant laborers from sponsoring their dependents for legal entrance to the countries in which mothers are employed (2005). For these children, the opportunities for better housing, educational opportunities, and the other economic benefits derived through their mothers' financial support cannot replace the love and caring that they expect to receive from mothers, leaving children feeling emotionally deprived despite their physical proximity to fathers and extended families (ibid).

Scholars have also begun to draw attention to the ways that affect and emotion—through the subjective shifts experienced by individuals' intimate encounters—*enable* transnational practices. Faier, for example, tracks the ways in which Filipina women—former sex workers who marry Japanese husbands in rural Nagano—are able to craft meaningful senses of self in their work and married lives by drawing on global discourses of love (2007). In this way, Faier focuses on how "affective terms of global processes can promote understanding not only of the constraints and possibilities through which new transnational subjectivities are taking shape," but she also documents "the ways that transnational practices themselves are made possible by sentiments such as love…" (ibid. 158). In talking with the Chinese-born senior migrants I have gotten to know over past years, I think it's clear that "sentiments such as love" (ibid.) do serve as positive motivators for their decisions to migrate to the U.S. late in life (Newendorp n.d.). At

the same time, it is also clear that affect and emotion are implicated in producing effects of constraint around transnational practices for this particular generation of contemporary Chinese senior migrants—as these individuals negotiate personal and familial tensions around which family members to join and which family members to leave behind—at times hindering their ability to make full use of the globally-changed landscape which now affords Chinese individuals significantly increased possibilities of moving to the U.S. than at any other time in the past two centuries. As a result, I argue here that these glimpses of emotion made visible through Chinese seniors' migration narratives—in which past experiences of immobility are juxtaposed against contemporary possibilities of mobility—not only reveal important contours about migrants' emotional attachments to their family members in China and the U.S. but, in so doing, complicate assumptions about the ease of transnational movement for this generation of Chinese migrants. In particular, these narratives suggest a different kind of obstacle to transnational movement than the economic and legal barriers that kept Chinese transnational families separated in the past. That this complication makes itself visible through talk about family will not be surprising to scholars who have long focused on the central role that family life occupies in Chinese society more generally (see, for example, Yan 2003, Fong 2004, and Newendorp 2008).

In making this argument, I draw on the fieldwork I have conducted with Cantonese-speaking Chinese seniors in the greater Boston area who have immigrated to the U.S. since 1990 at or after their age of retirement in China. Between July and December 2009, I collected 20 interviews with 22 individuals; most of these interviews took the form of oral history interviews which lasted from 1 to 2 ½ hours each. All interviews were conducted by me in Cantonese. I supplemented these interviews with regular participant observation at two locations: an adult day health center for Chinese seniors in Boston's Chinatown and Harvard-student run ESL and citizenship classes for Cantonese-speaking migrants.[3]

Chinese Seniors' Transnational Lives: Common Histories of Familial Separation

The increased ease of movement from China to the U.S. is reflected in the growing numbers of Chinese immigrants who have been arriving in the United States over the past two decades. Chinese-born immigrants are currently the fourth largest foreign-born immigrant group in the U.S., and are, on average, older than immigrants who arrive in the U.S. from other countries: over 30% of Chinese-born migrants who have entered the U.S. in the past two decades have come after the age of sixty (Mui and Shibusawa 2008: 3).[4] Many of those Chinese seniors reside in Massachusetts, where, in 2010, 7.3% of migrants were Chinese-born (Terrazas and Batalova 2010), with the majority living in the greater Boston metropolitan area (Lo 2006). While less well-known than traditional Chinese gateway areas to the

United States (like New York and California), Boston is one of the few American cities outside of these areas that has had a continuously well-demarcated "Chinatown" that dates to the late 1800s (To 2008). Current Chinese migration to the area continues to have strong roots in this long history, with significant numbers of Cantonese-speaking Chinese seniors arriving through the sponsorship of siblings or in-laws whose family ties to Boston date to the early or mid-20th century. At the same time, many other Chinese seniors' moves to the Boston area are a result of sponsorship by adult children who migrated to the U.S. for graduate school or as professionals in the 1980s and 1990s, drawn by the area's many institutions of higher learning and professional job opportunities.[5]

Younger adult migrants from China have three main pathways (in addition to family reunification) to immigrate to the U.S.: they can migrate as students; they may migrate as white collar workers; or they can make use of well-developed smuggling networks to settle illegally here. For older adults, who are at or near the end of their working careers and who were educated—if they were educated at all—in an era before computers and without English instruction, family reunification is their only real pathway to migration and settlement in the U.S. Thus, whether sponsored by siblings or by adult children, family is at the center of individuals' later-life migration trajectories. In many cases the migration of retired seniors provides working adult children with childcare at little or no cost. In other cases, seniors who are sponsored by their grown siblings and in-laws may be the initiators of migration chains with the goal of sponsoring their own adult children (and their families) to come to the U.S. in the future.

In almost every case the decision to immigrate the U.S. and join relatives here entails leaving other close family members behind in China. Most seniors I interviewed talked about those decision-making processes—about whether they should move to the U.S. or stay in China—in pragmatic terms, emphasizing factors such as which grandchildren had other grandparents available to care for them; which set of in-laws were physically healthy or adaptable to living in the U.S.; or how the importance of family ties meant that *of course* they would choose to live wherever adult children were living (see Newendorp n.d.). Yet the overall focus on the pragmatic nature of the decision-making processes described by many Chinese seniors was made more ambiguous by occasional strong emotional statements, such as when one woman in her 60s blurted out: "in fact, we didn't want to come here. Our children insisted that we come." In most cases, these emotional concerns were expressed in quieter terms, woven into the fabric of our conversations about seniors' migration experiences through talk about missing and worrying about (*gwajyuh*) unmarried adult children and grandchildren left behind in China, through talk about making return visits to take care of parents' graves, or through the silences that resulted when individuals (like Mrs. Lee) found their emotional responses to previous instances

of familial separation too strong to express in words.

The frequency with which men and their sons left southeast China over several centuries to seek their livelihood in other locations, leaving behind wives and children, has been much written about (see, for example, Hsu 2000 and Kuhn 2008). Thus, it should not be surprising that stories of separation—and sometimes disappearance—of family members who migrated to the U.S. before or during exclusion also figured into the transnational migration narratives of my Chinese-born senior interviewees. For Cantonese-speaking seniors, many of whose families are Toisanese, these stories of familial separation are particularly prevalent. The story told by Mr. S about his family from Toisan falls within this familiar frame. Mr. S's grandfather, whom he never met, was the first family member to leave Toisan. He told me that he didn't actually know much about his grandfather's migration history, because his grandfather "…didn't really take care of his family. He came to [the U.S.], and he didn't remember about his family. All I know is that he came here, so my father only had his uncle and his brothers [to rely on]. My dad's older brother is in the Philippines. He's not in America. So he didn't follow his father." Mr. S's father also left home to live and work elsewhere, although he didn't go as far away from Guangdong as his father and older brother had. Instead, Mr. S's father went to Hong Kong, where he lived and worked for almost all of Mr. S's life. Mr. S spent his childhood and most of his adult years in Guangdong Province, yet he was unable to visit his father in neighboring Hong Kong because of strictly imposed restrictions on exiting from China and entering into Hong Kong. Although his father came to visit from time to time, "even when he died, he was in Hong Kong." Today, many of Mr. S's family members continue the region's diasporic tradition: in addition to his uncle in the Philippines, most of his family lives in Canada and the U.S.[6]

This migration story, like those of other transnationally mobile Chinese individuals over the past two centuries, highlights how the "family" continued to exist as a sentimental institution (and, most likely, an economic one as well) despite the separation of individual family members across disparate locations over long periods of time. The "disappearance" of Mr. S's grandfather, along with the settling of Mr. S's uncle in the Philippines and his father in Hong Kong, both had their bases in the economic realities and social conventions of 19th and 20th century China that facilitated the movement of male family members to locations beyond China while preventing female family members from engagement in those same patterns of movement.

Decades-long periods of separation among family members were the norm for transnational Chinese families divided across the Pacific. Recalling an interview with one "Golden Mountain Wife" (that is, a wife left behind in China when her husband traveled to California to make his living), Hsu writes that "[f]or a Golden Mountain Wife, a good marriage consisted of receiving a steady stream of letters and enough

money to build a new house, educate children, and perhaps buy land" (2000:104). Separation from wives also often meant separation from children, particularly female children. One of my interviewees, a woman immigrant who came to the U.S. in her 50s almost 20 years ago, had not seen her U.S.-resident father for over 40 years, since she was a young child. Originally from Toisan, her family fled to Burma to escape the Japanese during World War II. She told me:

> My dad was here [in the U.S.] for a long time. I saw him when I was little, when he took us to Burma. After [I was] five or six, I didn't see my dad again. He was in America, and I was in Guangzhou. … He was in America before we went to Burma, but he [came back to China] to take us to Burma, and afterwards he returned to America. So, we couldn't see each other for a long time, ***even though we always wanted to*** [my emphasis].

This woman and her family—her mother and two sisters—returned to Guangzhou after the war. Then in her teens, she married, had children, and worked. When she retired, in the late 1980s, her thoughts returned to her father, whom she hadn't seen since she was six: "When I was little, I didn't really think about [not seeing my father]. But after I grew up and thought about it, I really wanted to see him. A lot of people were immigrating here [to the U.S.], so I [decided I] wanted to come and see him." Leaving her husband, adult children, and sisters behind, she moved first to San Francisco, where her father lived, and later to Boston, where her uncles lived. Twenty years later, her husband, adult children, sisters, and uncles all live in the U.S., although her father has now passed away. While securing U.S. citizenship for her adult children and their families was most likely also an important motivation for her decision to migrate on her own to the U.S. in her 50s, she did not talk about that motivation in her interview. Nor did she talk about economic or political motivations to leave China after she had retired there. Instead, her decision was primarily framed within the context of sentimental attachment to her family, focusing on her desire to see and be with the father she had not seen since she was six years old.

For earlier generations of Chinese migrants—this woman, and also Mr. S's parents and grandparents—the points of immobility around which we glimpse emotional concerns were rooted primarily in the economic and social structures that prevented all Chinese citizens an equal "ease" of movement abroad. Yet for the particular generation of contemporary Chinese migrants who concern me here—individuals such as Mrs. Lee, Mr. S, and this woman—who were born just before or during the Japanese Occupation of China in the late 1930s, the points of immobility that reveal important moments in their migration stories have a different point of origin. These points of immobility hinge primarily on the politically imposed systems of control over the Chinese population instituted shortly after the establishment of the PRC on October 1, 1949.

State Control and the Limits of Mobility in the Maoist Era

For the contemporary Chinese-born seniors whose migration stories I focus on here, new regulations for controlling the movement of the population internally in China that were implemented over the first decade of PRC rule meant that PRC citizens had no means to engage in the transnational forms of mobility that their parents (primarily fathers) had practiced throughout their lives. In some cases, like that of the woman I discussed in the previous section, family members were caught abroad in the U.S. or other international destinations to which PRC citizens were not allowed to travel. Moreover, in the early years following the establishment of the PRC, social and political policy did not easily allow for the return of overseas Chinese family members, who, if and when they did decide to return, were confronted with a radically new social and political environment from that they had left as young adults. For some Chinese abroad, this new environment meant that there was a rationale for returning to China, since overseas Chinese were called on to help contribute to building a new, socialist China. Yet, like other PRC citizens, once these individuals returned to China, they were restricted from leaving China to return to their homes and work overseas. At worst, returned migrants—particularly those coming from the U.S. rather than Southeast Asia—faced persecution, injury, or imprisonment. By the late 1950s, return was no longer a possibility.

These mobility restrictions that prevented reunification with or even visits to family members abroad applied equally to family members living in Hong Kong as to those living in farther-flung destinations, like the U.S. One interviewee, now 78 years old, who immigrated to Boston in 1990s with his wife to join an adult daughter already living there, talked about how he had been separated from his family in Hong Kong for his entire adult life following his decision to return to the mainland for college in 1950. Mr. Moy explained how his life had been "divided into three phases." He was born and raised in Hong Kong, lived on the mainland for his working adult years, and migrated to the U.S. at retirement. Overall, the bulk of his adult life has been spent separated from his parents and siblings, all of whom lived in Hong Kong. He said:

> Before I was 20, I was in Hong Kong. I was born in Hong Kong and lived there until I graduated from high school. Then, I went to the mainland and went to college in Guangzhou. After college, I went to Shanghai to work. That was for 40 years, until I turned 60 and retired. Then I immigrated to America. … The mainland was "liberated" (*gaaifong*) right after I graduated from high school, so, at that time, Hong Kong colleges were hard to get into. There weren't many colleges and the opportunity for higher education was limited. Before liberation I had tested into college in Guangzhou, but then, after I applied, liberation took place [that is, the PRC was established] and so I had to decide if I should go back

> for my education or stay in Hong Kong to work. I decided to get more schooling, so that I could be more knowledgeable. That's why I went back to China to continue my education.

When Mr. Moy graduated from college in Guangzhou, he was assigned to a work unit in Shanghai—a desirable, urban environment in comparison to some of the remote locations where his classmates were assigned. He lived and worked in Shanghai throughout his adult life, eventually marrying his wife, a professional like himself in Shanghai, and they had two daughters. By this time, he longed to be able to see his parents and siblings in Hong Kong, but Cultural Revolution politics made Mr. Moy's return to Hong Kong impossible:

> After I went to the mainland, my family was in Hong Kong, so I was in China by myself. At the time I wasn't married, and my parents were healthy, so I wasn't homesick. After I grew up and had a family, then I wanted to be able to see my parents. But at the time, the political situation was such that if you wanted to leave and return to the mainland, you needed official approval. You couldn't just leave on your own. For some reason, I didn't get this approval, and I couldn't go back to Hong Kong. So, I just stayed there [in Shanghai].

In this account, the homesickness Mr. Moy experienced as an adult—which led to his unsuccessful attempts to get an exit permit that would allow him to visit his aging parents in Hong Kong—was not a topic that Mr. Moy dwelled upon in our discussion. Yet the longer term effects of this experience of (almost) life-long separation from his parents were reinforced when Mr. Moy talked about his fulfillment in having his entire family—his wife, his two grown daughters, and their husbands and children—live within a short distance of each other in a suburban area of Boston. Moreover, Mr. Moy also emphasized his frequent visits to siblings living in other parts of the U.S. and Canada, along with regular visits to Hong Kong to pay his respects at his parents' graves.

Exiting and re-entering the mainland were not the only ways that potential migrants' mobility was restricted. Following the establishment of the PRC in 1949, movement *within* China was also strictly controlled through assignments to particular work locations, where citizens' placement in a *danwei* (work unit) controlled access to food (through ration-coupons), housing, healthcare, education, and pensions, along with possibilities for travel to other locations within China. While this form of state-allocated control over movement was prevalent throughout the Maoist period and continued in many cases to be effective through the 1980s (see Mr. S's account, below), the ten years during the Cultural Revolution from 1966–1976 represented the most stringent period of control over internal movement in China, as youth and intellectuals were "sent down" from urban to rural areas of China to be "re-educated" in the principles of revolution and class struggle by performing agricultural labor.

For one 75-year old migrant, who moved to Boston to join her only son's family several years ago, being "sent down" to labor in the countryside meant that she was forced to leave her home in Guangzhou, along with her then eight-year old son, less than one month after her husband had died from an illness he had fought for ten years. As my interviewee became upset and found it increasing difficult to talk about how she had been forced to move far away from her son while they were both still grieving for her husband, I had to stop the interview. Later, she was able to continue:

> At first my husband's mother lived with us, but then when I no longer had a family, she had to go live with someone else. So, the four of us in our family, we were all separated. My son went to live with my mother. My mother was very good. She knew that I had to go to the countryside and couldn't take care of my son, so she said she would take care of him for me. At the time, everyone had to go to the countryside. There was no such thing as special circumstances. There are four words that can best describe this situation, '*ga san, yahn mohng*,' [meaning that the family was split apart]. We couldn't do anything because it was the Cultural Revolution.

As with Mrs. Lee's account of her brother's attempted flight from China during the same period, this woman's inability to narrate key life events involving pain suffered as a result of the lack of control over individual and familial movement in Maoist China serves as a powerful interpretive tool. Through these narrative "silences," we are allowed glimpses of emotion from past "immobilities" that nonetheless remain residually powerful and seem to stand in contrast with seniors' contemporary accounts of the ease of transnational mobility. These glimpses of powerful emotion that continue to inflect migration stories grounded in stories of reunification with long-separated family members can surely be no accident, embedded as they are in accounts of familial reunification (and separation) that form the primary motivation for seniors' moves from China to the U.S. at a time of life in which they might more comfortably live in China. In the next section, my analysis moves beyond this focus on "glimpses" of sentiment to examining in-depth one particular migration story in which the narrative is *permeated* by (rather than *inflected* with) powerful emotion. In Mr. S's recounting of his immigration experience to the U.S., separation from family members during his adult working life in China provides the rationale for why he has chosen to come to, and stay, in Boston with his wife and daughter's family, despite the fact that he does not particularly like living in the U.S., and despite the fact that this separation causes him significant worry about his adult unmarried daughter who lives in Guangzhou, where he longs to return and take care of her.

Contradictions in Transnational Family Life

The story that Mr. S told me about his separation with his family during his adult working life was decidedly less dramatic than the

stories of familial separation told both by Mrs. Lee—whose brother tried repeatedly to leave the mainland for Hong Kong before finally achieving this goal—and the woman I described in the previous section, who was separated from her son during the Cultural Revolution. Both of those past experiences of separation included moments of grief and fear that remain residually powerful for my migrant interviewees, who struggled to articulate their feelings about these past separations. Mr. S's story of separation also differs from the stories told by the woman who moved to the U.S. to be near her father in her 50s and by Mr. Moy, both of whom desired to reunite later in life with parents from whom they had been separated for the majority of their lives. For Mr. S, the striking aspect of his story of separation from his family is that of the mundane consistency that separation plays throughout: his grandfather disappeared to the United States before he was born; his father lived his whole life in Hong Kong, visiting the mainland only rarely; and for 21 years—from 1971–1992, the time of his marriage, until the year before his oldest daughter left home for college—socialist state policies on work-allocation prevented Mr. S from living with (or near) his wife and daughters.

Mr. S and his wife (now in their mid-60s) were high school classmates who went to different colleges. His wife, who had studied Chinese medicine, was originally assigned to work in a rural area of Guangdong Province. Mr. S's studies in engineering were interrupted by the Cultural Revolution, and he was assigned to work in a factory in a city on the border of Guangdong and Fujian Provinces. The young couple had two daughters: one was sent to live with Mr. S's mother when she was six months old; the other began living with her when she was one. Both Mr. S and his wife applied multiple times for work unit transfers, in an attempt to live together and with their daughters. In 1984, his wife finally managed to get transferred back to Guangzhou, where their daughters were. Mr. S explained:

> In the 1970s and 1980s, there was a policy that was supposed to take care of "husband and wife relations" [that is, allow husbands and wives to live in the same location]. If a husband and wife had been separated for too long, then they could be transferred [so that they could live together]. … If only one person wanted to transfer it was easier. If both the husband and the wife wanted to be transferred back to where their kids were, then it wasn't as easy. … We tried our best to get transferred back. I was transferred to the countryside near Guangzhou; it wasn't the city itself. My wife was transferred twice before she got back. After more than 20 years, I was transferred back [to Guangzhou].

Although both husband and wife lived in Guangdong Province, they were not able to visit each other—or their children—more than a couple of times each year.

> It was very hard to take time off then. You could take time off to visit relatives once each year. … During Spring Festival I would come back and visit my parents and children. It was just once a year.

> Where my wife worked was a little better. It was easier for her to get days off. If she had any problems, she could take a few days off and visit me. The most often we saw each other was twice a year.

Separation was also complicated by the difficulty involved with trying to communicate any way other than writing letters.

> It was very troublesome (*mahfaahn*). My daughters were so young, and if they were sick, it was very hard to talk to them. No one had telephones at home. You had to go to the telegram area and call from there. There were no telephones in the *danwei* that you could use to call long distance; you could only make calls within the city. But then when you called someone, they didn't have a phone either....

Mr. S's decision to immigrate to the U.S. together with his wife two and a half years ago was made within the context of these 21 years of separation from her throughout their young and middle-aged adult lives. Talking about his decision to move to and stay in the U.S., he described his considerable ambivalence and contrasted his feelings with those of his wife:

> After [my wife] retired in 2003, she came here to visit [our daughter and grandchildren] and stayed for a year. ... She felt that it was nice here and that we might as well come here to help our daughter take care of her sons... But I'm not very used to [life here]. It's not as convenient (*fohngbihn*) to eat and buy things in America. In China, I can just go to the [super]market to buy anything I want, but it's not as convenient here. But since my wife wanted to come here, and my daughter wanted us to come here, I decided it was fine. Even after our [visas] were approved, I still had to think over my decision to come here some more. I was still uncertain whether or not I should come. I thought I might go back [to China] after coming here. But since I was here, and my wife didn't want to go back because she was used to it here, so I decided to stay as well.

Mr. S's ambivalence about migrating to the U.S. focuses not only on his own personal "convenience"; it also hinges on his feelings of contradiction and conflict at being separated from his younger daughter, a professional in her 30s who lives in Guangzhou. Although his daughter is satisfied in her job and makes a high salary working for an international company, Mr. S misses her and worries about her:

> I always worry about (*gwajyuh*) her because she's not married. She's so old now, and she's still by herself. Back when I was in Guangzhou, I made soup and good food for her to eat. Now, she's just by herself, and just eats out most of the time. So, I worry about her and call her sometimes. She tells me that she is eating well, and that she knows how to make soup. We don't even have many relatives left in Guangzhou [who could help look after her]. Almost everyone has emigrated and left the country. They're in Canada and America and San Francisco, and a few here in Boston.

The concerns expressed here by Mr. S center around his daughter's status as an unmarried adult. Since she is already in her 30s, he may fear that she is unlikely ever to marry. In this context, the fact that she doesn't have close relatives or other family to help take care of her now is not nearly as concerning as the possibility that she will continue to be alone for the rest of her life, which will most certainly be the case if Mr. S and his wife remain here, as his wife wishes. Worry about (*gwajyuh*) unmarried adult children who had been left behind in China (or who had migrated to other locations and were living without family nearby) was also a topic of concern in my conversations with other senior migrants. These feelings of worry seemed equally focused around unmarried daughters and sons, with most seniors' goals oriented towards sponsoring adult children to immigrate to the U.S., so that the family could be reunited here. In Mr. S's case, however, his daughter had made clear that she liked her job and preferred her lifestyle in China, and that she had no need or desire to immigrate to be with him and the rest of her family in Boston.

Mr. S's concerns over this separation—the result of Mr. S and his wife's engagement with the increased possibilities of movement in this current period of easy transnational mobility—continue to hinge on his earlier impossibility of mobility that prevented him from being together with his daughters when they were growing up. When I asked him about his desire to be with his daughters at this stage in his life, he said: "Let me tell you a joke: I used to go home once a year to visit my family. When I went home, my daughters didn't recognize me. They didn't know that I was their dad. Their grandma told them to call me 'dad,' and they ran away from me. They were afraid of me because they never saw me." When viewed through the lens of this revelatory quote, Mr. S's current migration experiences—in which he is trapped between his desire to remain with his wife and older daughter's family in the U.S., and his desire to return to live in China, where he would be more comfortable and could take care of his younger daughter—present a startling picture that complicates our understanding of his experience of transnational mobility. Rather than being able to take advantage of the ties that he has here in the U.S. as well as in China to travel back and forth between the two, Mr. S's situation indicates a certain mimesis of the past and the lack of control that he had over his mobility for the majority of his daughters' lives—even through his current lack of control is rooted in his emotional attachments rather than socialist-era political and social structures.

After talking with me for one and a half hours about his migration experience, I thought that Mr. S had finished telling me his story. Yet as soon as I turned off the recorder, Mr. S surprised me by saying: "If you ask me about my migration here, there's nothing much to say about it (*hou poutuhng*). But if you ask me about my life before, that's more complicated." Then, he reiterated what had been the main theme that had surfaced earlier in the interview: the fact of having been separated for so long from the

rest of his family during the majority of his working life, and how miserable and unfortunate (*chaam*) that separation had been for him. Mr. S further reminded me of the past hardships that were foremost in his mind in talking about the decisions that he had made to move to and stay in the U.S.—how he hadn't been able to live with his daughters until they were just finishing up high school; how his daughters ran away from him on visits home; and how he had to stay "in place" where he was working because of the socialist political context that prevented unofficial or easy movement from one location to another. Moreover, Mr. S wanted to make sure that I understood that he really had no other choice but to comply with this past policy; to eat, he said, one had to have ration coupons, which were tied to one's work unit. Likewise, work leaves of any kind had to be approved and properly stamped by work unit authorities. These economic and political ties to place were reinforced by ideological ones. As Zhang has noted, socialist-era policies in China reinforced both Confucian cultural norms of "rootedness" as "the normal state of being" as well as "mobile people [as] socially polluting and even dangerous to established communities" (2001: 35–6).

Mr. S's story calls to mind the common forms of separation faced by contemporary transnational families in which fathers are often separated over long periods of time and space from spouses and children and, through this process, are excluded from the emotional life and daily structure of family life. Talking about the children of such families, Parreñas emphasizes the sense of exclusion experienced by children who grow up with little access to fathers (2008). In contrast, Mr. S's story presents a different perspective—that of the father who was "away," despite living in significantly closer geographical proximity to his family than fathers who participate in transnational labor migration. Through his actions of migrating to the U.S. in his senior years, Mr. S has sought to make up for the long-enforced period of separation from his wife and daughters that defined his working adult years, even as the transnational mobility of his family members has required that he make certain choices about which family members he can live together with now.

Conclusion

Given the great diversity of individuals' migration experiences, it seems problematic to talk about particular migrants as "typical." To the extent to which I am willing to make this generalization, I can say that Mr. S is typical of his generation of recent Chinese senior migrants to the greater Boston area. He is originally from Guangdong Province, from a family with a long history of sending migrants overseas. He and his wife immigrated to the U.S. following their retirement from the workforce in China through the sponsorship of their adult daughter, who was married and living in Boston. As older migrants, one primary reason for their move to the U.S. was to help look after their American-born grandchildren. Moreover, in coming to the U.S. to join their daughter's family, they also left another adult daughter

behind in China. In all these important ways, the transnational migration experience of Mr. S and his wife is similar to those of many other Chinese-born senior migrants I know. Mr. S and his wife also enjoy certain benefits that are not shared by all Chinese-born senior migrants: they are both still physically active and healthy; they have other relatives, in addition to their adult daughter's family, who also live in the Boston area; and they can afford to travel back to China to visit their friends and family there.

When taken together, all of these characteristics seem to indicate that Mr. S and his wife are beneficiaries of the many advantages of living in this contemporary period of transnational and global movement. In particular, the relative ease with which they were able to come to the U.S. to join their daughter, along with the relative ease with which they should be able to return to China to visit friends and family there, provide a striking contrast to the difficulties that Chinese migrants (and would-be migrants) had in coming to the U.S.—or in returning to China—over most of the 19th and 20th centuries. Yet it would be a mistake to view Mr. S's migration experience wholly within a simple frame that primarily emphasizes the ease of his contemporary transnational mobility. As he explained, his story is far more complex, bound up as it is in experiences of separation from his wife and daughters over 21 years of his adult working life. When I asked him whether he had plans to visit his unmarried daughter in Guangzhou, he told me:

> I could [go by myself to visit my daughter], but back when [my wife and I] were young, we were separated for so long, and it was so difficult (*gam sanfu*) because we could only see each other once a year. So, we don't want to be separated any more. I guess I could leave [my wife] to go back [to Guangzhou] for a short visit—I guess I could do that. But not for more than a month.

In other words, at his current stage of life, Mr. S has no wish to be separated from his wife for even short periods of time, even though he has the money, the opportunity, and the desire to return for extended visits to China.

Separations from close family members have been a commonplace experience for participants in Chinese diasporic and transnational lifeways, just as it was often an integral aspect of life for many young adults in the Maoist and (even) post-Mao eras. Yet far from being relegated to the past archives of individual memory, these experiences of mobility restriction continue to be powerfully embedded in contemporary Chinese citizens' accounts of their current transnational ties and movement. In the narrative re-tellings of their migration experiences, it is precisely at these moments of talking about past limitations of mobility through which we glimpse moments of deep emotion that remain residually important in recent Chinese migrants' lives, particularly as seniors talk about the transnational familial ties—and separations—that characterize their migration trajectories between Southeast China and the U.S.

In this paper, I have focused analytical attention on these glimpses of emotion revealed through the juxtaposition of stories of past restrictions and limitations of movement with Chinese seniors' stories about the seeming ease of contemporary transnational movement. In particular, I argued that these "site"-ings of emotion that inflect—and occasionally permeate—the migration stories I have collected from recent Chinese senior migrants to the Boston area force us to question the seeming ease of movement for this generation of Chinese seniors in this current transnational era and to re-evaluate the seeming benefits and drawbacks to mobility processes in this contemporary era as individuals work to reconcile worry about and desires to be with family members in multiple locations. At best, these glimpses indicate that this generation of Chinese migrants experiences their new possibilities of movement as ambiguous, revealing contradictions at the individual experiential level over the seeming benefits of transnational mobility. At worst, these glimpses indicate that some migrants may feel trapped and unable to take advantage of the possibilities of movement to which they have access. Both views suggest a different kind of obstacle to contemporary transnational movement than the obstacles that pertained in earlier periods, when social, political, and economic conventions prevented the ease of movement that characterizes most transnational migrant trajectories today.

Notes

1. Mrs. Lee, like the other migrants' names I make reference to in this paper, is a pseudonym.

2. See Yan (2003) for an in-depth discussion of the history of anthropological accounts that focus on a dominant paradigm that portrays the Chinese family as a "corporate" entity, excluding—for the most part—the role of the individual in those family units. Yan explains that in this approach, "the Chinese family is an organization characterized by a common budget, shared property, and a household economy that relies on a strict pooling of income.... A key feature of the Chinese family is its flexibility and entrepreneurial ability to make the best of both family resources (capital and labor) and outside opportunities in larger social settings" (ibid. 3-4). With this model, changes in family life and structure are viewed as "determined by the economic self-interest of the domestic group as a corporate enterprise" (ibid. 4).

3. My research for this project is ongoing. Financial support for this research has been provided by the Institute for Asian American Studies at UMass Boston as well as Harvard University's Schlesinger Library.

4. In 2008, Chinese-born immigrants comprised 3.6% of the foreign-born migrant population in the U.S., following Mexicans (30%), Filipinos (4.4%), Asian Indians (4.3%) (Terrazas and Devani 2008). One million Chinese-born migrants entered the U.S. between 1990 and 2006—500,000 between 1990 and 2000 and another 500,000 between 2000 and 2006. Between 1990 and 2000, the Chinese population in the U.S. grew by 48% (Mui and Shibusawa 2008: 7). Mui and Shibusawa write that: "The population of Asian American elders increased by 78% between 1990 and 2000 [to a number of about 800,000 individuals in 2000], and this number is projected to increase to close to 7 million in 2050.... In contrast to Asian Americans, the non-Hispanic, white elderly population is projected to grow by only 74% in the next twenty-five years" (2008:1).

5. In general, those migrants with longer family ties to the greater Boston area tend to originate from rural areas in southeast China, speak Cantonese (or dialects such as Toisanese or Hakka), have low levels of education, and live in Boston's densely populated Chinatown or one of its two urban, lower class satellite communities of Quincy or Malden. In contrast, those seniors who have migrated through the sponsorship of adult children often originate from urban areas across China, speak Mandarin, are well-educated, and have held jobs in government, teaching, and other professional capacities. This latter group tends to reside either in wealthy, suburban locations with adult children or in government-subsidized elder housing in urban and suburban areas in and around Boston. These two groups are not, however, mutually exclusive, and my Cantonese-speaking interviewees are drawn from both groups.

6. Hsu writes, "Between 1978 and 1985, an average of 8,118 people left [Toisan] each year—about 138,000 in all. In 1980 alone, 16.2 percent of the county's population departed for other countries. … By 1986, there were 950,000 people remaining in the country, 460,000 were related to someone overseas" (2000: 183-4). The seniors interviewed for this paper emigrated on average a decade later than these earlier waves of migrants who left Toisan in the first decade of post-Mao reform. However, many of my interviewees were sponsored by their family members who had left during that earlier period.

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